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Application No. 10/715,827

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IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) A retaining system comprising:

a first element including a body extending along a longitudinal axis between first and second end portions, the body having at the first end portion a first maximum outside dimension perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, and having at the second end portion a second maximum outside dimension perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, the second maximum outside dimension being greater than the first maximum outside dimension, and the body including a band generally surrounding the longitudinal axis at an intermediate portion between the first and second end portions, the band having including:

a first lateral surface generally facing the first end portion;

a second lateral surface generally facing the second end portion, the second lateral surface being substantially parallel to the first lateral surface, and the first and second lateral surfaces being substantially orthogonal to the longitudinal axis; [[and]]

a crest spaced between the first and second lateral surfaces, the crest defining a third maximum outside dimension greater than the first maximum outside dimension and less than the second maximum outside dimension;

a first sloping surface extending between and coupling the crest and the first lateral surface; and

a second sloping surface extending between and coupling the crest and the second lateral surface, the first and second sloping surfaces together define a semi-circle when viewed in a cross-section including the longitudinal axis, and the crest defines an apex of the semi-circle when viewed in the cross-section; and

a second element adapted to extend along the longitudinal axis and to surround the body, the second element including a first section proximate the first end portion, a second section adapted to abut the second end portion, and an intermediate section extending between and resiliently coupling the first and second sections, the intermediate section being adapted to overly the band only at one position.

2. (Original) The retaining system according to claim 1, wherein the first element comprises a threaded fastener, the first end comprises at least one thread, the second end comprises a head, the intermediate portion comprises a shank, and the band comprises an annular ridge extending from the shank; the first maximum outside dimension comprises a first outside diameter, and the third maximum outside dimension comprises a third outside diameter.
3. (Original) The retaining system according to claim 2, wherein the second element comprises a helical compression spring, the first section comprises a generally closed first end lying in a first plane that is substantially orthogonal to the longitudinal axis, the second section comprises a generally closed second end lying in a second plane that is substantially orthogonal to the longitudinal axis, and the intermediate section comprises at least a portion of a coil having a pitch along the longitudinal axis; the first closed end having a first inside diameter greater than the first outside diameter, and the second closed end having a second inside diameter slightly less than the third outside diameter.
4. (Original) The retaining system according to claim 3, wherein the coil obliquely overlies the ridge.
5. (Original) The retaining system according to claim 3, wherein the band has a longitudinal width between the first and second lateral surfaces, and the longitudinal width of the band is less than the pitch of the coil.
6. (Original) The retaining system according to claim 2, wherein the ridge extends around the shank substantially orthogonally to the longitudinal axis.
7. (Currently amended) A retainer for holding along a longitudinal axis a helical compression spring with respect to a threaded fastener; the helical compression spring including generally closed first and second ends that are generally parallel to one another and including at least a portion of a coil having a pitch along the longitudinal axis and coupling the first and second ends, and the first end having an inside diameter; the threaded fastener including a threaded section, a head, and a shank coupling the threaded section and the head, the threaded section and the shank having outside diameters less than the inside diameter; the retainer comprising:

an annular ridge projecting from shank, the annular ridge including:

a first lateral surface generally confronting the head;

a second lateral surface generally facing the threaded section, the second lateral surface being substantially parallel to the first lateral surface, and the first and second lateral surfaces being substantially orthogonal to the longitudinal axis;
[[and]]

a crest spaced along the longitudinal axis between the first and second lateral surfaces, the crest defining a maximum ridge diameter greater than the inside diameter of the closed first end;

a first sloping surface extending between and coupling the crest and the first lateral surface; and

a second sloping surface extending between and coupling the crest and the second lateral surface, the first and second sloping surfaces together define a semi-circle when viewed in a cross-section including the longitudinal axis, and the crest defines an apex of the semi-circle when viewed in the cross-section.

Claims 8 and 9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently amended) The retainer according to ~~claim 9~~ claim 7, wherein the first and second sloping surfaces together define a semi-circle when viewed in a cross-section including the longitudinal axis, and the crest defines an apex of the semi-circle when viewed in the cross-section.

11. (Currently amended) A method of releasably retaining along a longitudinal axis a helical compression spring with respect to a threaded fastener; the helical compression spring including generally closed first and second ends that are generally parallel to one another and including at least a portion of a coil having a pitch along the longitudinal axis and coupling the first and second ends, and the first end having an inside diameter; the threaded fastener including a threaded section, a head, a shank coupling the threaded section and the head, and an annular ridge projecting from shank, the threaded section and the shank having outside diameters less than the inside diameter, and annular ridge including a first lateral surface generally confronting the head, a second lateral surface generally facing the threaded section, and a crest spaced along

the longitudinal axis between the first and second lateral surfaces, the crest defining a maximum ridge diameter greater than the inside diameter of the first end; the method comprising:

moving substantially without interference away from the threaded section the first end over the first lateral surface;

snapping the first end over the crest in a first longitudinal direction; and

moving substantially without interference toward the head the first end over the second lateral surface and a portion of the shank; and

moving substantially without interference away from the head the first end over the portion of the shank and the second lateral surface;

snapping the first end over the crest in a second longitudinal direction opposite to the first longitudinal direction; and

moving substantially without interference toward the threaded section the first end over the first lateral surface.

12. (Currently amended) The method according to claim 11, further comprising:
holding loosely the first end between the head and the second lateral surface.

Claim 13. (Cancelled)

14. (Currently amended) The method according to ~~claim 13~~ claim 11, further comprising:
moving substantially without interference the first end over threaded section.